What Satellite & Digital TV ★GOLD★

MANHATTAN PLAZA HD-S2

This high-definition Freesat receiver gives you that little bit more and at a remarkably low price

WHILE FREESAT HD receivers in the living room tend to be twin-tuner recorders, when you want to make the most of an HD TV in the kitchen, bedroom or family room, usually a straightforward HD Freesat set-top box is all that's required – which is exactly what you get with Manhattan's Plaza HD-S2.

Even better you get everything from an HD Freesat box that you could possibly ask for, including BBC iPlayer and ITV player, easier access to non-Freesat channels and cracking quality high-definition reception – and all for less than 50 quid, which has to be a bargain.

Build and connectivity

The HD-S2 is small, almost to the point of not being taken seriously. Although not quite in the mini-receiver league, it's just 21cm across and only 4cm high – that's the size of my paperback copy of *Cloud Atlas*.

Despite its small size, the HD-S2 has some style about it. The front panel is a shiny black acrylic panel with pleasant curved ends, set in a matt black plastic frame. There are just three buttons (power and channel up/down) on the front and a single power indicator light. It's all very understated and classy.

A look inside reveals the chassis additions for a card reader on the right hand side of the front, but the HD-S2 is only available as a Freesat machine for unencrypted channels.

The rear of the receiver is pretty busy. Manhattan has not gone overboard with the connectivity, but it's got all that most users are likely to need. There's a single LNB input, but this does not drive a

THE OPPOSITION

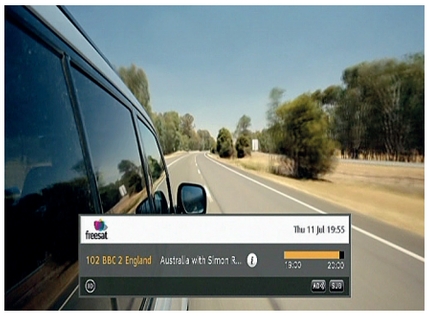
Bush BFSAT01HD

- 40 percent more expensive and with lesser picture quality, less integrated non-Freesat channels access, slower to operate and search

Alma S1800

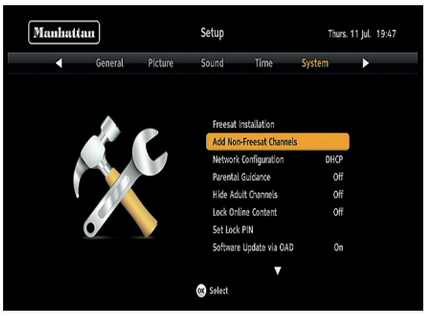
- Smaller, cheaper, with DiSEqC control and PVR ready – but not a Freesat machine so slower search, no Freesat EPG and no iPlayer

INTERFACE



With the HD-S2 you can watch excellent quality high-definition pictures and access the full Freesat 8-day programme guide

Freesat and Non-Freesat channels can be stored alongside one another in favourite channels lists to be treated as a group



The HD-S2's comprehensive and easy-to-navigate menu system includes an effective search for non-Freesat channels

'Despite the relatively small price tag, the Plaza HD-S2 delivers top-notch pictures and sound'

DiSEqC switch (or DiSEqC motor) so this really is a machine for 28.2°E only – although that won't put off the audience this receiver (and Freesat itself) is mostly aimed at.

The main connection to a TV screen is via HDMI, which delivers hi-def images and digital sound. For those with a separate sound system, there's an optical S/PDIF digital audio output, too.

The only SD video and analogue audio output is the single Scart socket, but that's enough for connection to a DVD recorder or PVR for recording programmes. The Scart might even be connected to a stand-alone modulator to send Freesat TV around the home by UHF as, like most Freesat receivers, the HD-S2 has no built-in modulator.

The back panel also includes an Ethernet socket for connection to a broadband router (for online catch-up TV) and a USB socket for updating the software (although over-the-air downloading of updates is also available). It's a shame this is not also for connecting PVR storage – if you want to record Freesat programmes, you'll have to get a Freesat+ machine.

The one part of the HD-S2 that lets the side down is the remote control. Although this operates fine and the buttons are sensibly laid out, it is small and cheap looking and not up to the standards of the receiver.

Setup

All Freesat receivers follow much the same set-up procedure, laid down by Freesat, and the HD-S2 is no different. On first switch-on, you set the HDMI output format, check the signal levels, enter your postcode (using either the number keys in the normal texting fashion, or a pop-up onscreen keyboard) and start the search. This takes about 1.25 minutes, which is quite long for a Freesat search, but still short enough for hassle-free occasional use.

The HD-S2 will also search for and find non-Freesat channels, of which there are a good few – the likes of Arise News (in HD), Horse & Country TV, and innumerable shopping, music and religious channels.

You can either search an individual transponder (a Manual Scan) or all of them (Automatic Scan). In the test, the Automatic Scan took under 1.5 minutes to find all the channels on 28.2°E that are not part of the Freesat platform.

As there is no DiSEqC control from the HD-S2, searching for (and viewing) channels from other satellite positions is not very practical. You can use a manual LNB switch to change between an LNB for 28.2°E and one for some other satellite position, but you cannot perform a whole-satellite search on the other satellite because its transponders are not in the HD-S2's database. Instead, you can search each individual transponder and find channels that way, but it's a tedious way to scan a satellite!

The only other setup process is the internet connection, and this is all automatic with DHCP setting the network addresses (although these can be set manually, too).

Basic Use

Like the setup, the receiver's everyday operation is largely controlled by the Freesat specification. However, Manhattan has bent this a little to make it easier to use and more flexible.

The Freesat channels are listed onscreen with a preview window showing the currently selected channel. You can preview another channel by highlighting it in the list and pressing OK and then switch to viewing that channel with another press of the OK button.

You can also switch directly to other channel lists – Freesat radio, non-Freesat TV, non-Freesat radio and the favourite channels lists are all displayed 'in parallel' so you can

FEATURES

No LNB inputs: 1
LNB Loopthrough: No
DiSEqC: No
Selectable FEC: No
Symbol rate range: 2000 - 45000
Blind search: No
Linux: No
CAM: None
Common Interface: None

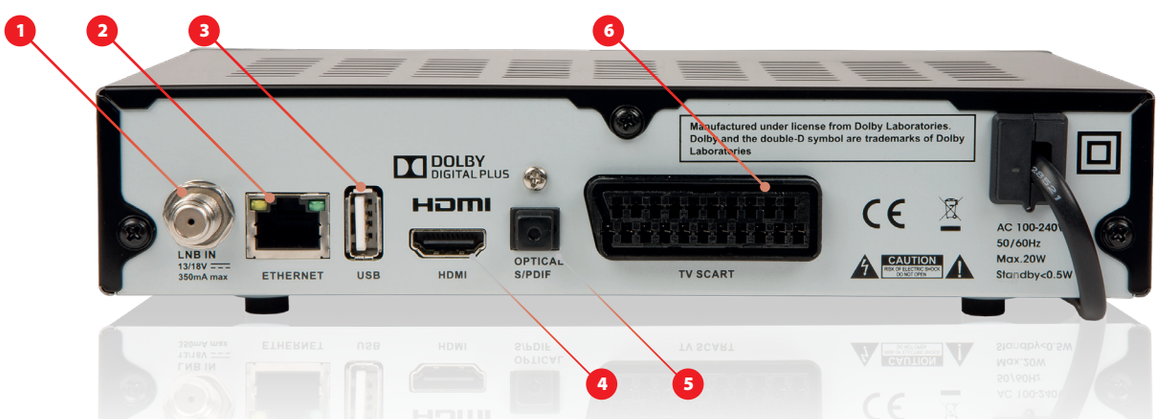
Teletext: DVB decoded
EPG support: DVB now/next, Freesat 8-day
Timer: Unlimited events, 8-day
Hard drive: None

UHF modulator tuning: n/a
Software upgrade: Over-the-air or USB download
Data ports: USB, Ethernet

AV outputs
SD out: TV Scart (Composite, RGB)
HD out: HDMI
Audio out: Optical digital audio

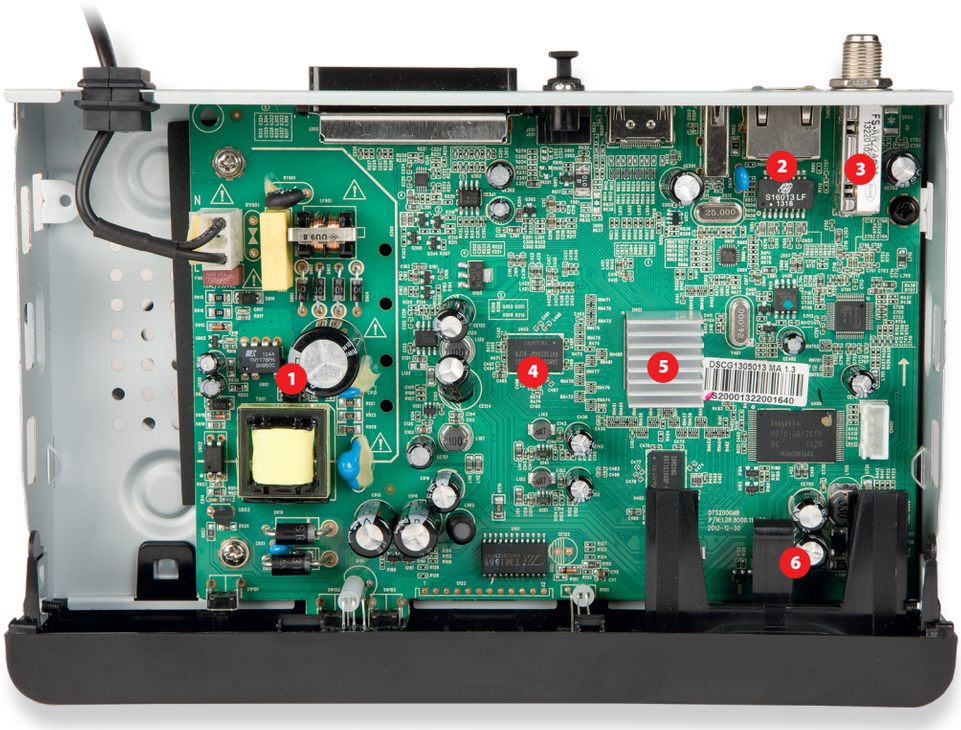
CONNECTIVITY

1. LNB input
2. Ethernet network connection
3. USB data connection
4. HDMI
5. Optical digital audio output
6. TV Scart



IN THE BOX

1. Built-in power supply
2. Ethernet interface
3. IF tuner
4. Memory
5. Central processor
6. Unused card reader framework



easily move between them. The favourite channels lists (eight of them) can be populated with any channels you want from both the Freesat and non-Freesat channels so you can, say, set up a list of news channels that includes BBC News, Sky News, NHK News, and Arise News and move between them seamlessly although they are some on, some off the Freesat platform.

Then there's the 'browsing bar', displayed when the channel is changed, which not only gives the details of the channel and the programme on now, but also what's on next on this channel and what's on, on any other channel – to select another channel if anything takes your fancy. It's the ultimate channel-hopping convenience.

If you still can't find the channel you want, the name search will soon locate it. The EPG also follows the Freesat form, with the channels arranged into content categories, but the HD-S2 has the favourites lists as alternative categories, so that you can see the programme schedules for the (Freesat) favourite channels together.

This is the cream on the cake for the favourite channels system, which takes Freesat on the HD-S2 to a new level of real-world ease of use.

Performance

Despite the relatively small price tag, the Plaza HD-S2 delivers top-notch pictures and sound. You want an HD receiver to produce vibrant, lively images and crystal clear sound that do justice to the best-quality transmissions from BBC, Sky, NHK, and so forth – and the HD-S2 does not disappoint. SD reception, upscaled to HD for display is impressive, too.

Given a half-decent internet connection, BBC iPlayer and ITVplayer videos are presented in excellent shape, and overall you're left with the feeling that the Plaza HD-S2 is performing well above its price ■ **Geoff Bains**

VERDICT

The Plaza HD-S2 probably takes a straightforward Freesat receiver about as far as it can go. The tuner behaves well with any reasonable signal, the images and sound are excellent, and the integration of non-Freesat channels into the user-friendly navigation means that the HD-S2 is more than 'just' a Freesat receiver. That the HD-S2 is also so ludicrously cheap makes it the clear choice.

RATINGS

PLUS
- Low price
- Good picture and sound
- Easy access to non-Freesat channels

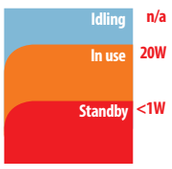
MINUS
- Cheap-looking remote
- No support for other satellites
- Not PVR-ready

Build	★★★★★★★★☆☆
Setup	★★★★★★★★☆☆
Searching	★★★★★★★★☆☆
Navigation	★★★★★★★★★☆
Performance	★★★★★★★★★☆
Features	★★★★★★★★☆☆
Value	★★★★★★★★★★

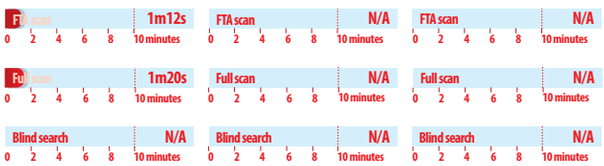
Overall

86%

TEST AND MEASUREMENT



POWER USAGE
Consumption is quite low and the economical standby mode saves power and money



SEARCH: 28.2°E
Fairly fast at Freesat setup and no slow-coach to access all the other FTA channels on 28.2°E either

SEARCH: 19.2°E
Without a transponder database for other satellites, it can't scan a whole satellite other than to 28.2°E

SEARCH: 13°E
Without a transponder database for other satellites, it cannot scan a whole satellite other than to 28.2°E

VIDEO FORMATS	
MPEG-2	●
DivX	●
AVI	●
Xvid	●
MKV	●
WMV	●
MTS	●